Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening

I.   SUMMARY

The Elections Support Project (ESP) had several notable accomplishments this reporting period despite the deteriorated security situation. Throughout the reporting period, IFES provided the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) with analytical information as well technical expertise in organizational capacity building, information technology/information and communications technology (IT/ICT), and in the planning process for district elections. IFES also supported IHEC in reviewing options for introducing e-Voting in Iraq. A series of important workshops took place (see Table 1), operational assistance continued smoothly, and significant strides were made in IHEC's strategic communications planning.

Finally, the opening of the IHEC Electoral Education Institute (EEI) paved the way for offering educational and training materials and specific training programs to different electoral stakeholders. IFES provided the Institute with trainings and assistance in defining the overall goals, objectives, strategy, partnership, technology needs, activities and programs of the Institute. During the workshop conducted by IFES for the Institute management and staff, IFES and Institute staff defined its vision and mission, and developed a roadmap for future success.

Security issues and budgetary constraints, which stem from issues pertaining to the national budget process, remain a major issue to building long-term, sustainable infrastructure at IHEC. However, it is IFES' experience that IHEC remains committed to its long-term mission as an institution of transparency in its implementation of elections in Iraq.

Table 1: IFES-facilitated Trainings and Workshops, January 01 – March 31, 2015.

Date	Location	Title	Total Participants	# of Female Participants	NO/GEO* Participant Distribution
January 11 - 14	Erbil	Procurement, Bids, and Government Contracts Training (third session)	32	4	6/26
January 18 – 21	Erbil	Training on the operational procedures and maintenance of the verification and registration electronic devices (first session)	34	2	16/18
January 23 – 26	Erbil	Training on the operational procedures and maintenance of the verification and registration electronic devices (second session)	33	0	11/22
February 14	Baghdad	National Media Conference	42	4	N/A*
February 15 - 18	Erbil	Procurement, Bids, and Government Contracts Training (fourth session)	33	5	8/25
February 16 - 17	Erbil	District and Sub-District Elections Planning Workshop	32	4	25/7
February 22 - 25	Erbil	Voter Registration Centers Staff Training of Trainers (first session)	35	3	11/24
February 18 – 19 and 22 - 23	Baghdad	ManageEngine ServiceDesk Training	6	0	6/0
March 1 - 3	Erbil	e-Voting working workshop	31	3	16/15
March 8 - 11	Erbil	Voter Registration Centers Staff Training of Trainers (second session)	30	0	10/20
March 16	Baghdad	Organizational Strategy and Alignment for Electoral Education Institute workshop	10	2	10/0
March 29 – April 8	Erbil	BRIDGE Train the Facilitators (TtF)	32	3	21/11
Total workshop participants			**350**	**30**	**140/168**

- *National Office (NO); Governorate Electoral Office (GEO)*
- *The participants were media outlet representatives*

II.   POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL CONTEXT

Security

During this reporting period, Iraq continued to experience an escalated level of violence and conflict as the Islamic State (IS) forces increasingly targeted the Government of Iraq (GoI), which, along with international support, has attempted to counter IS advancement. Traditionally safe areas, such as Erbil, have also recently faced growing concerns about safety as fighting between the IS, Kurdish peshmerga forces and independent or government-aligned militias moves near areas that the IS controls. There are no predictions at this stage as to if and when the IS crisis will be resolved.

Throughout the reporting period, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) supported by local Sunni tribes, Kurdish peshmerga forces and international coalition forces, fought the IS in all areas controlled by the insurgents. It has led to further progress in recent security operations against the IS in Kirkuk, Anbar and Salah Al-Din provinces.

At the end of March, the ISF and allied forces reached and cleared the areas of Tikrit where the IS was believed to be the most thoroughly entrenched. The fall of these positions from the IS control deals a significant blow to the organization's presence in the area. This advance against the IS in Tikrit aided by coalition airstrikes.

The liberation of Tikrit is a milestone not only in the fight against the IS but also for the Prime Minister (PM) Al-Abadi and the U.S.-led coalition in cementing the sovereignty of the Iraqi state and the ISF. The final stages of the operation were carried out without the presence of Iranian-backed Shi'a militias, making Tikrit the first major urban center cleared without Shi'a militias and providing a significant psychological boost for the ISF following the collapse of many ISF units in June 2014. The PM Al-Abadi hinted that upcoming operations will follow a model similar to that of Tikrit, suggesting a prominent role for the ISF and the U.S.-led coalition.

However, a counter-attack by the IS to retake Tikrit remains possible, especially if the ISF's gains are not consolidated. Historically, Tikrit has been a center of insurgency since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, and low-level, persistent violence is likely.

The next stages of the fight against the IS in Iraq will likely center around gaining control of key positions in Anbar and Ninewa, which are still under tight IS control, as well as maintaining the current tactical defense positions.

Political Situation

In the reporting period, the Al-Abadi government finalized the state budget, completed an Iraqi-Kurdish oil agreement, initiated anticorruption actions, took steps to improve relations with the

Sunni community, and also offered the promise of better relations with Saudi Arabia and other counties in the region.

On January 8 and January 12, the Council of Representatives (CoR) held sessions to discuss the 2015 draft budget law, which was introduced on December 25, 2014 and approved by the Council of Ministers (CoM). On January 29, the CoR approved the 2015 federal budget worth 119 trillion Iraqi Dinars (US$105 billion), after significant changes were made to the allocation of expenditures and reduction of oil prices from $60/barrel to $55/barrel. The final 2015 budget was reduced from the previous proposal of 125.5 trillion Iraqi Dinars. On February 10, the President Fuad Masum approved the 2015 federal budget law of 119 trillion Iraqi Dinars and a deficit of up to about 25.4 trillion Iraqi Dinars.

PM Al-Abadi has also initiated a number of anticorruption initiatives. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) arrested five officers of significant status within the MoI, on charges of corruption. This action came after a major crackdown on "ghost soldiers" and the previous dismissal of several high-ranking officials. During Al-Abadi's visit to Cairo on January 12, he also remarked on the process for restructuring Iraq's military forces, indicating ongoing reforms and further action expected in both the MoI and Ministry of Defense (MoD). On January 13, the CoM decided to approve contracting an international company to provide services and strategic expertise in supporting the Iraqi government in fighting corruption.

There were political tensions with the ongoing oil dispute between Iraq's central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) over budget payments throughout the period under review. The Kurdish Members of Parliament (MPs) stated that most requirements from the KRG, such as payments to Peshmerga soldiers, were resolved. However, outstanding issues related to Kirkuk oil and gas exports will be discussed during further talks between the central government and the KRG. During a meeting between the KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani and Iraqi PM Al-Abadi in Baghdad, the two sides were unable to come to a solution over the lack of cash reserves in the national budget for the KRG payments. The Iraqi Government is expected to make a partial payment transfer for the KRG budget in the coming period. At the time of writing of this report, the KRG claims that while it is exporting approximately 95 percent of the required oil output, the central government has failed to disperse the entire 17 percent of the federal budget to the KRG, a figure stipulated by a December 2014 agreement between the two sides.

Also, in the reporting period, several legislative bills remained held up in the CoR as the Iraqi government tried to reach consensus on a number of important laws, such as the National Guard formation and the Justice and Accountability Act. The draft National Guard law, which intends to create a security force that would be a locally-based - and thus reflect the unique sectarian and ethnic makeup of each of Iraq's governorates - and answerable to the provincial government, and then the prime minister, went through its first reading before the CoR after its referral from the CoM. The law is a key demand of Sunni politicians in order to fight IS. The Parliament Deputy

Speaker revealed some details of the 22 articles in the bill, which also proposed three candidates to lead the National Guard. The force would be armed in a way similar to the federal police, with medium rather than heavy weaponry, and would fall under the command of the General Commander of the Armed Forces. On February 8, the CoM announced approving the Accountability, Justice, and Banning Baath Party's Draft Law, which amends the country's de-Baathification legislation enabling vetted former Baath party members to re-enter government service and the security forces, in addition to the National Guard Draft law. The drafts were sent to the State Consultations Council (Shora Council) to review before sending to the CoR.

PM Al-Abadi stated that the formation of the National Guard will take place within six months and will cover existing militias and anti-IS tribal groups under the MoD. The law would pave a way to support forces in Anbar and Ninawa governorates, where heavy fighting is ongoing, and allow the mobilization of armed groups in other areas under the oversight of the central government.

Finally, on March 1, the Iraq Kurdistan Region (IKR) Independent High Elections and Referendums Commission conducted a meeting and elected Hindreen Mohamed Salih - Erbil Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) Manager - as the Board of Commissioners' Chairman. Mr. Salih attended a number of IFES trainings over the course of the ESP.

III.   PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Objective 1: IHEC's Strategic Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Capacity is Strengthened

Building on the experience IHEC gained during the drafting of the strategic plan, and following adoption and publication of the plan, IFES continued assisting IHEC in developing and building monitoring and evaluation processes that will allow for the continual review and assessment of the strategic plan.

Activity 1.3: Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plans

Sustainable institutional capacity to conduct strategic and operational planning is built upon the bedrock of solid monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools. Review and evaluation is an ongoing process that is necessary to encourage continuous improvement, and provide evidence of the impact of IHEC's activities and an informed basis for decision-making and future planning.

IFES developed the basic concept of country-led M&E and practical on-the-job training for M&E tool use. IFES also prepared and submitted to the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) a concept paper about the M&E workshops to be conducted in the next quarter. Participants will include members of the Strategic Planning Committee, staff from the IHEC Capacity Building Department (CBD)

and members from other departments, such as the Public Outreach Department (POD). The CBD, through their discussions with the CEO, has identified six staff members to work with IFES. The CBD has also identified the individuals who will be involved in the workshops broken out into six separate groups ranging from 19 to 32 participants. All workshops for the National Office (NO) staff will be conducted in the IHEC Data Entry Center (DEC).

IFES is assisting the IHEC M&E staff in developing custom indicators for specific electoral events to track implementation of the strategic plan, as well as development of systems and procedures for operationalizing the M&E plans. IFES developed and provided IHEC with the "Foundational Building Blocks for the IHEC Monitoring and Evaluation Process" document. This document is the next step of the strategic planning process, namely the tracking of progress of the strategic plan's implementation.

IFES continues to work with IHEC to further cascade the plan development down to the division and section levels within IHEC. The following model and methodology was approved by IHEC as the baseline to follow in the development and training of IHEC staff towards the M&E goal.
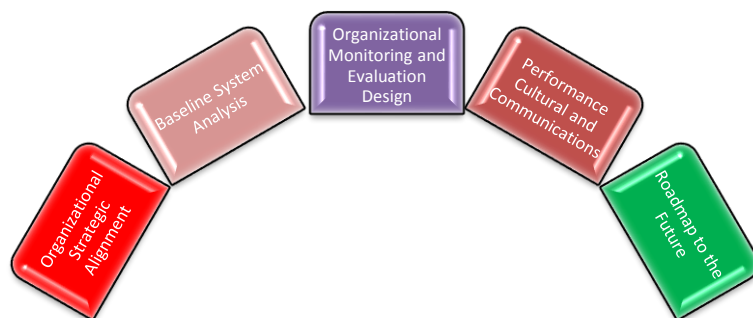

Figure 1: Steps in the M&E Process

Objective 2: IHEC's Internal Management Processes and Systems are Strengthened

IFES continued to support IHEC in enhancing financial and administrative capabilities as well as in implementing continuous voter registration (CVR) and improving IT/database systems. IFES also supported IHEC in conducting an assessment of the training needs of the IHEC software developers.

IFES finalized the grading of results from the second stage of the capacity assessment of 30 IHEC staff members, identified by the IHEC Board of Commissioners (BoC). The actual test took place on December 17, 2014 with 27 IHEC staffers participating. On January 25, IFES submitted the final assessment report to the CEO. The report provided an overview of the assessment process, the results of both testing stages, and recommendations for next steps.

As the result, the IHEC BoC issued decision No. 4 (dated March 10, 2015) regarding the forming of the results tabulation team. IFES prepared a training concept for 13 identified IHEC staff members in the field of software and database development. The purpose of the training is bringing the existing IHEC developers up to the modern standards of software and database development and familiarizing them with the existing version of the results tabulation software. The trainings

also aim at increasing the number of IHEC developers capable of working on the results tabulation software, ensuring the ability of the IHEC to efficiently manage the results tabulation for future electoral events. The letter regarding the training was submitted to the CEO.

Activity 2.1: Support the IHEC Finance and Administration Directorates to Improve Staff Capacity to Prepare and Execute Bids, Contracts, and Budgets

In the last three years of programming, IFES cooperated closely with the Finance and Administration Departments of the IHEC. One of the weaknesses identified is the lack of experience and skills of IHEC staff in preparation and execution of bids, contracts, and budgets.

To address this issue, IFES developed, in cooperation with the CBD, a concept for a series of four workshops targeting staff at the NO and at the GEOs to train them on the procurement, tenders, and government contract procedures updated by the GoI.

In the reporting period, IFES conducted the remaining two of the four scheduled workshops.

On January 11 – 14, IFES conducted the third session of Procurement, Bids, and Government Contracts Training in Erbil. The 32 participants (including four women) were staff members of the Monitoring and Internal Auditing Department Legal Units and Finance Department.

On February 15 - 18, IFES conducted the fourth and last session of the Procurement, Bids, and Government Contracts Training in Erbil, with 33 participants (including five women) from the IHEC NO, and six GEOs. The participants were staff members of the Monitoring and Internal Auditing Department Legal Units and Finance Department.

Figure 2 Participants of the Bids, Procurement and Governmental Contracts Workshop February 15-18, 2015

Both trainings were conducted by the IFES Procurement, Bids, and Government Contracts Local Consultant and the Director of Monitoring and Internal Auditing Department. The training materials included the procurement guide, which will be used by IHEC staff members as a reference for the updated procurement instructions.

The workshops' objectives were designed to ensure complete understanding starting from identifying the needs to buy specific goods or services and the preparation of the technical specifications and the estimated cost, whether by

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procurement request form or the tender implementation and the requirements of the preparation for the necessary documentation, also the procedures for advertising or direct invitation, analysis down to the authentication committee, and then contracting, implementation and exchange.

Activity 2.2: Advise IHEC on the Implementation of Continuous Voter Registration Processes and Decentralized Data Entry for Voter Registration

IFES supported the IHEC in conducting trainings on the operational procedures and maintenance of the verification and registration electronic devices and the first level of the cascade training module to train approximately 1,100 CVR staff members (*please see section Activity 2.4.1: Automated Voter Registration below*).

IHEC has recently been allocated US$12 million for biometric registration for the remainder of the current year, and IHEC intends to disperse the funds to the GEOs. The main registration drive will start when this money is allocated (which is expected on May 1), in 11 GEOs. The IHEC will employ approximately 1,900 new staff in the registration centers, resulting in a total of about 3,550 voter registration workers. The IHEC has a plan for the training of these new staff and the cost of training is included in the budget for biometric registration. If there are additional financial allocations in the next year, the IHEC will open new registration centers and increase the number of staff. In this case, IHEC would aim to finish 70% of the biometric registration by September 2016. IHEC has also prepared a central media plan for the biometric registration, based on billboards and TV advertisements.

By the end of March 2015, approximately 800,000 people had been registered. Of these, about 375,000 were women. The percentage of successfully captured and recorded fingerprints is 91 percent. The average daily rate of registration is about 11,000 persons.

The IHEC is also distributing electronic cards which were not collected during the original distribution period in early 2014. Approximately 5,650 have been distributed so far.

On March 24, the BoC decided to approve the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the IHEC and the Ministry of Youth and Sport for strengthening mutual cooperation and support for the national project of CVR.

Activity 2.3: Implementation of a Comprehensive Electoral Training Curriculum Based on the BRIDGE Curriculum

In September 2011, IFES and IHEC launched a comprehensive training program to help IHEC staff gain a deeper understanding of the electoral process and the international standards for genuine and credible elections. The program – Building Resources in Democracy, Governance, and Elections (BRIDGE) - consists of introductory training workshops, custom-tailored workshops, technical modules workshops, and modules specifically designed to target stakeholders.

IFES continued to provide BRIDGE trainings in order to bring IHEC staff up to the desired level, at which point they will be competent to train their colleagues on elections-related issues, thereby building a sustainable internal training system. These BRIDGE trainings are geared towards an internal audience, i.e. IHEC staff from the NO and GEOs.

In the reporting period, IFES worked with the CBD and the IHEC EEI on the development of a concept paper for the third phase of the BRIDGE Project in Iraq. An internal needs assessment was developed by the IHEC to identify the needs and requirements for the project. As a result, it was agreed that the third phase will start with a Train the Facilitator (TtF) workshop targeting staff members from the NO and GEOs. The objective is to expand the pool of IHEC BRIDGE semi-accredited facilitators. IHEC will depend on those facilitators to disseminate the knowledge on electoral systems and processes, and to educate IHEC staff and stakeholders in the future. The training took place in Erbil March 29 through April 8 with 26 staff members (including two females). The training was facilitated by the IFES BRIDGE facilitator, IFES Project Manager, and six IHEC trainers (including one female).

Finally, IFES worked with the CBD, EEI and IHEC's BRIDGE facilitators to select and develop training materials for four different BRIDGE Modules to be implemented by IFES in the next quarter. The concept, materials, and agenda for two modules on Electoral Contestants and Electoral Dispute Resolution were prepared and customized for the Iraqi electoral environment.

Activity 2.4: Support to IHEC in introducing technology in elections

IHEC has started a process of introducing technology in the electoral process. The acquisition of its automated voter registration (AVR) system at the end of 2013 and the announcement of the intention to implement electronic voting (e-Voting) by 2018 are significant steps towards automation of the Iraqi elections. IFES plays an important role in the long-term viability of this process, both from strategic and advisory points of view.

Following the IHEC request for IFES assistance to assess the security vulnerabilities of the IHEC website and preventing hacker attacks, IFES advisors prepared an assessment report and developed a patch for security vulnerabilities. The patch, together with the description and instructions, was submitted to the CEO to be handed over to the IHEC website team for future implementation in order to prevent potential website hacks. The outcome of the implementation of the security patch will be the increased resistance to the attacks on the IHEC website.

During the reporting period IFES continued working on the capacity building of the IHEC IT staff and providing technical assistance to the IHEC IT Department. IFES worked with the Voter Registration (VR) Department staff to restore the functionality of the IHEC Website, which contained the scanned result forms of the general voting for the 2014 CoR and Iraq Kurdistan

Region Governorate Council (IKR GC) elections; the website was down for some time due to the misconfiguration of the web and database server, however the functionality of the website was fully restored and configuration files were backed up. Additionally, IFES continued to support IHEC IT staff in fixing and resolving issues with the servers, network and systems. IFES trained the staff on how to track and resolve the problems, and documented the problems and solutions for future reference.

IFES worked on solutions to the IHEC exchange mailbox storage size limit issue (the mailbox did not have adequate storage for IHEC needs) and on Windows Server Update Services (WSUS) issues. The WSUS is used to manage, distribute, and download updates, hotfixes, service packs, and device drivers released for Microsoft products from the Microsoft update website and then distribute them to computers on the IHEC network. The instructions on how to increase the exchange server 2003 SP2 Database Size Limit, in case similar issues occur in the future, were submitted to the IT Department Director.

IFES also worked with IHEC's IT section on solutions to limit and control internet access for te IHEC employees due to decreased internet bandwidth from 20M to 5M. IFES provided technical support to the IT section in installing and maintaining the hardware devices and software. IFES also followed up with the IHEC IT section and EMC Company on the EMC backup and recovery system.

On February 18 – 19 and 22 - 23, IFES conducted the four-day on-site training on the ManageEngine ServiceDesk system at the IHEC premises for six IT staff members. The software will help the IT section in incident management (trouble ticketing), assets tracking and purchasing, contract management, and self-service portal. The first two days of on-the-job training focused on theoretical aspects while the last two days provided knowledge on the practical implementation. The IT Manager asked IFES to provide this training also to the rest of the IT staff. The second training will start on April 5.

Activity 2.4.1: Automated Voter Registration (AVR)

On January 18 – 21, IFES conducted in Erbil the first session of the training on the operational procedures and maintenance of the verification and registration electronic devices with 34 participants (including two women) from the IHEC NO and the GEOs. The second session was conducted on January 23 – 26 with 33 participants (no women).

The training was the first level of the cascade training for continuous voter registration centers' staff and targeted IHEC trainers. The workshop aimed at educating the participants on the biometric registration and electronic verification procedures as well as the electronic registration and verification devices hardware and software. Some of the workshop recommendations include

reduction of number of fingerprints accepted for the purpose of allocating the card to the voter and exporting the data to the external storage unit on a daily basis.

The main recommendations of these sessions include: the IHEC training policy should be examined and adjusted to introduce content to improve understanding of how components in a solution interact; better use should be made of graphic and diagrammatic tools in describing technical solutions to problems; and the second and third tiers of training for continuous voter registration centers' staff will need to be strictly monitored by both IHEC and IFES to ensure that the quality of knowledge transfer remains of high standard.

As a result of the training, IHEC conducted the second and third level training in all provinces except Anbar, Nineveh, and Salah ad-Din, due to security considerations. The third level of training was divided into sessions in order not to affect the continuous voter registration process. A total of 1,125 staff members participated in the training.

On February 22 - 25, IFES, in cooperation with IHEC, conducted the first out of two Voter Registration Centers (VRCs) Staff Training of Trainers sessions with the participation of 35 VRCs staff members (including three women) from the South, Center, and North GEOs. The second session took place on March 8 - 11, with the participation of 30 VRCs staff members (no women) from the South, Center, and North GEOs. Both sessions were conducted by five trainers from IHEC's NO and IFES' Project Manager (PM). The training objective was to introduce training methodology and materials to a selected group of VRCs' staff who will serve as trainers in the cascade training of all the VRCs' staff members in Iraq to be conducted by IHEC in the next quarter.

IHEC has responded to IFES' recommendation to transfer files electronically from the registration devices to IHEC, to alleviate risks of lost data due to manual processing or "hacking." IHEC gave the necessary requirements specifications to the vendor INDRA, and is waiting on a project proposal. A need has been identified within the IHEC regarding the lack of facilities to perform the extracts and updates to the registration and verification devices. While there is a move to develop this skill within the organization, IFES will be assisting by drafting a concept paper for this process.

In the absence of a long-term, coherent management strategy, IHEC has been using technology fragments (disparate systems, based on different technologies from different vendors), leading to a host of problems. Long-term planning from an ICT perspective becomes difficult. Consolidating skills under a single management infrastructure leads to the advantages of better trained personnel, a single point of contact, consolidation of physical (hardware) resources, and consolidation of human resources. IFES is looking at ways to facilitate consolidation in IHEC as part of strategic planning.

Finally, IFES advisors have been working on data privacy issues. In Iraq, IHEC is acting on behalf of the federal government; the collected data will not remain within IHEC, and will in all likelihood be made available to other government institutions. This does not violate any legal principles, provided claims of data privacy are not made. However, there are no regulations protecting citizens from misuse of data after it is collected. With the advent of biometric voter registration, this is becoming a critical issue. According to international standards, the first step in the process for ensuring data privacy is for the electoral management body to introduce regulations guiding the use of collected data, which should gradually become absorbed into law.

Data privacy covers the specifications defining the ways collected data can be used, and the legal process governing the collection of data. It protects the rights of the citizens from whom the data was collected, ensuring the data is used only for the purpose for which it was collected. It provides a legal foundation to prevent institutions from distributing personal data without proper controls.

Therefore, IFES recruited a data privacy expert to draft a report with recommendations to the IHEC, and ultimately to the CoM, regarding the use of collected voter registration biometric data. The report will look at international guidelines on the subject, and will extract some of the best practices, adapting them to the Iraq situation. The report should be finalized and submitted to the IHEC by the end of June.

Activity 2.4.2: Electronic Voting

During the second half of 2013, IHEC invested heavily in technology to reduce fraud and increase accuracy and reliability in the electoral process. It envisions that e-voting will be the next step in this automation process.

Figure 3: The IHEC Commissioners participating in the E-voting Planning Workshop on March 1 – 3, 2015

To assist IHEC in developing a way forward, on March 1 - 3, IFES conducted the E-voting Planning Workshop in Erbil with the participation of 31 representatives (including three women) of the NO, including the BoC Chairman, CEO, and two Commissioners, IHEC NO General Directors, and the GEOs Managers. The workshop objectives were to inform the IHEC management on options regarding e-voting technology, and present some success stories as well as failures. IFES also provided the participants with a better understanding of public needs for this type of technology to be successful. During the workshop, the IFES team provided information on suitable mechanisms for e-voting in Iraq, the use of technologies in electoral systems, security considerations, and the importance of informational campaigns and public perception of e-voting. IFES also presented case studies from different countries and a sample implementation plan. IHEC also presented its view on its own

needs. On the final day, voting equipment vendors conducted open displays and presentations of their systems and services. The workshop concluded with recommendations for establishing a committee to lead the processes with the following tasks: define the mechanism for e-voting, investigate the need for paper verification, define implementation timeline, estimate the cost, identify the personnel requirements; define the role of IFES in this process, define the model for the pilot project, and identify the needs for a media campaign.

Following the workshop, on March 24, the IHEC BoC decided to establish a committee of three commissioners, who will be supported by technical staff from the Electoral Administration to deal with e-voting options in Iraq and liaise with the AVR committee.

IFES will continue to play a role in this process. There are several aspects where guidance is needed, and more will become evident as the project matures. IFES is currently drafting a paper for the IHEC on "Paper Trails" (paper verification for e-voting). The importance and pitfalls of paper verification in e-voting needs to be highlighted, as it is not the panacea indicated by some vendors. In the case of e-voting, public informational campaigns are even more important than with voter registration, as trust in the process needs to be established before the solution is accepted. IFES will examine requests for additional expert advice from IHEC on an ad-hoc basis.

Finally, at the request of the CEO, IFES provided a set of selected translated documents and case studies on e-voting into Arabic to assist the committee in its decision making processes.

Activity 2.6.1: District and Sub-District Elections

The district and sub-districts elections (DSEs) are required by law to be conducted six months after the governorate councils elections (GCEs). Iraq conducted two GCEs in 2009 and 2013 and has yet to conduct the DSEs. The current councils continued exercising their role and authorities granted by the laws since they were established in 2004.[1]

In August 2013, the IHEC BoC and the Committee on Regions and Governorates Not Organized by a Region (CRGR) agreed to develop a roadmap and measures to implement the DSE regulated by the Law no.36 of 2008 on the Elections of the Governorates Councils, Districts and Sub-districts Elections. In November 2013, IFES conducted the DSEs planning workshop which laid out the foundations of identifying challenges and planning for this electoral event. However, members of parliament changed in 2014 after elections, and thus the membership of the Parliamentary Committee of Regions and Provinces changed as well. Accordingly, it was necessary to conduct another activity that builds on this workshop and also takes into consideration the current security situation throughout the country.

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[1] Law no. 36 of 2008 Article 46 /Third: *In case the elections were postponed, the provincial, districts, and sub-districts councils shall continue to run its own affairs until new councils are elected.*

Therefore, on February 16 – 17 IFES conducted the District and Sub-District Elections Planning Workshop in Erbil, which was attended by 32 participants (including four women) from the IHEC's NO, GEOs, the CoR, and MoP, and the Central Bureau of Statistics. The workshop was conducted by IFES in coordination with the IHEC BoC.

Over the two days of the workshop, the participants discussed all obstacles related to conducting the districts and sub-districts council elections. The participants reviewed the previous workshop recommendations and also discussed the legal framework for district elections, the operational aspects of those elections, boundary delimitation and disputed areas, as well as the special need voting and internally displaced people (IDPs) voting. The second day was dedicated to the voters' registration requirements, the distribution of voters and polling stations, the administrative boundaries statistics,

Figure 4: Participants of the district elections planning workshop, February 16 - 17, 2015

the security challenges, candidates' registration requirements, and seat allocation. As a result of the workshop, the participants agreed to form a joint committee to follow-up on the preparation for the election and produce a timeline proposal for consideration (no later than mid-2016).

On March 2, IHEC's delegation headed by the Deputy Chairman and five Commissioners met the CoR Legal Committee to discuss the obstacles IHEC is facing to proceed with the CVR and districts council elections. The delegation discussed with the Committee the recommendations from the IFES organized districts council elections planning workshop.

Activity 2.7: Support IHEC in development of an improved legal framework for electoral processes

IFES continued working with IHEC on providing day-to-day monitoring and training to the Legal Consultation and Complaints Section (LCCS), in addition to the Complaints Units at the GEO level.

Following the request of IHEC, IFES discussed the draft law on political parties, which went through the first reading at the CoR with the Commissioner in charge. IHEC prepared comments on the law, which were submitted to the CoR Legal Committee for consideration. The Commissioner asked IFES to review the comments and provide opinion and any additional input. IFES reviewed the document and provided a number of comments.

During the reporting period, IFES worked with, and provided legal advice when needed to, the LCCS. The Section provided approximately 27 legal opinions to the BoC, mainly concerning the

integrity cases followed by the Integrity Commission concerning contractual actions taken by the previous BoC.

Finally, IFES worked with the LCCS and the Data Management Section (DMS) on the possible creation of a complaints website and electronic submission of the complaints. IFES identified the ways to implement the electronic submission of the complaints, identification of the users and technical details related to the hosting, content of the website, and ways to make the existing complaints database to be available to the public through the website. While the electronic submission of the complaints still needs to be approved by BoC, putting the complaints database on the website for public access will greatly contribute to the transparency of the electoral process.

Objective 3: IHEC Capacity to Manage External Affairs with Key Electoral Stakeholders is Improved

The need for IHEC to develop an effective media relations strategy and a strategy for engaging all electoral stakeholders was identified during the design of the ESP and much work has been done since the inception of the project. To build on these efforts and further assist IHEC in implementing an effective outreach strategy and to solidify IHEC's reputation as an independent, neutral and transparent institution, IFES supported IHEC with the following activities.

Activity 3.1: Implementation of a strategic communications plan

IFES continued to work with and support IHEC on the development of the Communications Plan. IFES has supported IHEC in the development of a process to identify, develop and monitor an organizational communications methodology which is repeatable and sustainable.

On January 14, the IHEC BoC decided to approve all the recommendations adopted during the Communications Committee Planning Workshop conducted by IFES in Erbil on December 28 – 29, 2014. The Communication Committee was assigned to liaise with Electoral Administration to implement those recommendations. The established Committee consists of the BoC Commissioner responsible for communication, the POD Director and the CBD Director. It has been decided that, to avoid any confusion with the overall IHEC strategic plan, the strategic communication plan should be referred to as the "communications plan."

In the reporting period, IFES attended the regular meetings of Communications Committee (CC) to discuss the recommendations from the CC planning workshops held in December 2014. The Committee suggested projects and activities for future implementation: 1) a training program, to be implemented in conjunction with the EEI, targeting new journalists and media members in order to introduce them to IHEC's work, regulations, and procedures; and 2) a training program to target political entities (PEs) representatives about IHEC procedures. The participants also discussed challenges such as the lack of a budget for the biometric registration media campaign, as a result

of the still pending at the time approval of a national budget. The Committee also finalized the MoU with the Ministry of Education (MoE) on the holding of an annual elections day in schools for various types of elections education and outreach activities. The pilot program will be requested in Baghdad high schools allowing both parties to learn from the experience and develop a country-wide program.

Through the continued use of the framework of the communication plan, which was developed by the Communications Committee in coordination with IFES, the participants continued to develop their input for the plan by identification of current and future activities. The final plan will be reviewed and published in the next quarter.

According to the IFES survey results, television tops the list of information sources to learn about elections for Iraqis with large majorities indicating talk show and news programs on television are their preferred sources to learn about election-related issues and procedures.

Figure 5: Participants of the IHEC Media Conference, February 14, 2015

Given this, IFES supported IHEC in improving and enhancing relations with the media. On February 14, IFES, in cooperation with IHEC, conducted the Media Conference in Baghdad with 42 participants (including four women) representing the Iraqi Journalists Association; the Communications and Media Commission; the Iraqi Journalists Right Defense Association; and various media outlets. The conference began with a panel presentation of three white papers with recommendations and observations related to potential actions and interactions between the media and IHEC in future election cycles. The panel then opened up to discussions with the participants related to their papers and development of further recommendations.

Activity 3.2: Capacity building training in the design, implementation and conduct of voter information and educational programs - Conduct of National Surveys

Through the 2014 nationwide public opinion survey fielded after the CoR elections, IFES has collected information related to the implementation of AVR and the media campaign for those elections and also information related to how voter's experience may be improved in the next implementation stages. This information will be used to advise the IHEC on technical and public outreach activities. The data will also enable IFES and IHEC to identify target groups for public outreach, the types of messages that should be created, and the best vehicles for delivery.

The IFES 2014 survey was conducted in 15 of Iraq's 18 provinces between October 11 and November 8, 2014 by the Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies (IIACSS).

IFES is working on the final editing of the survey report to be presented to both USAID and IHEC. On March 31, IFES conducted a presentation for the IHEC BoC on the main findings of the IFES public opinion survey on the electoral process and democracy in Iraq. Previously, IFES also presented excerpts of the survey findings as they relate to public perception and confidence in the IHEC and its work during the E-voting Planning workshop. The presentation for USAID is scheduled for April 14, 2015.

Activity 3.4: Support the IHEC Electoral Education Institute

In January 2014, the BoC approved establishing the EEI which was created as a section under the CEO office with two units: electronic library and electoral research, and with six staff members seconded from the IHEC NO. The successful establishment of the EEI at IHEC is of crucial significance towards the realization of the broader goal of reforming and improving the management and administration of the electoral process in Iraq. The EEI was inaugurated in November 2014.

On January 14, the BoC approved the program for the EEI including conducting a number of workshops and seminars, as well as issuing a number of publications. IFES followed up with the Institute on implementation of the activities and scope of IFES support. On March 9, IFES met with the Director and staff of the EEI to discuss and coordinate future support activities. It was agreed that IFES will work with the EEI on strategy development, organizational structure, knowledge management, and staff functions/alignment, as well as processes and technology needs. IFES will also provide assistance to the EEI in implementation of the BRIDGE modules on the Elections Contestant and the Electoral Disputes Resolutions (EDR). In addition, IFES will help with development of a training manual to be used by the Institute during scheduled trainings for the new IHEC staff, political entities, and civic society organizations (CSOs). IFES handed over a number of publications in English and Arabic to be used at the EEI library.

On March 16, IFES held the Organizational Strategy and Alignment workshop at the EEI location in Baghdad Rusafa, for 10 staff members (including two women). The workshop goals were to define the overall goals, objectives, strategy, partnership and technology needs, activities and programs of the Institute. During the workshop the vision, mission and identification of strategic partnerships were defined, and a roadmap for future success and identified possible obstacles to the success were also developed. A follow up workshop will take place in mid-April.

Figure 6: Organizational Strategy and Alignment Workshop, March 16, 2015

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II.   FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Table 3: IFES-Facilitated Workshops, April – June 2015[2]

Workshop title	Targeted group (# of participants)	Venue	Duration	Proposed date
Organizational Structure and Alignment Workshop	Electoral Education Institute (10 participants)	Baghdad	1 day Session	April
Monitoring and Evaluation in Strategic Planning: implementation and tools Training	National Office staff (70 participants)	Baghdad	Multiple 1 day Sessions	April - July
Manage Engine Service Desk Training	IT Section Staff (10 participants)	Baghdad	4 days	April - May
Database and Software Development Training	National Office staff (13 participants)	Baghdad	4 days per week (ongoing)	April - July
BRIDGE Customized Module (Contestants module & Conflict resolution module) - session 1	National Office, EEI, and GEOs staff (24 participants)	Erbil	5 days	May
BRIDGE Customized Module (Contestants module & Conflict resolution module) - session 2	National Office, EEI, and GEOs staff (24 participants)	Erbil	5 days	May
BRIDGE Customized Module (Election technology & Voter registration) - session 1	National Office, EEI, and GEOs staff (24 participants)	Erbil	5 days	June
BRIDGE Customized Module (Election technology & Voter registration) - session 2	National Office, EEI, and GEOs staff (24 participants)	Erbil	5 days	June
Unifying Electoral Complaints' Regulations and Procedures - session 1	National Office and GEOs Legal Sections staff (30 participants)	Erbil	3 days	July
Unifying Electoral Complaints' Regulations and Procedures - session 2	National Office and GEOs Legal Sections staff (30 participants)	Erbil	3 days	July

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[2] This chart is indicative of IFES workshops in the next quarter. Dates and content are subject to change pending operational requirements and IHEC approvals.

III. QUARTERLY PROJECT BURN RATE

IV. CRITICAL ASSUMPTIONS UPDATE

This past quarter presented the ESP with major challenges to one of its critical assumptions due to the escalated violence in the country.

The assumption that *a secure environment is key to successful implementation of project activities* came into the forefront of external factors influencing the implementation of the project. During the period, a substantial part of the country's territory still remains under the control of the Islamic State, thus sparking national, regional and global alarm over the security and political situation in Iraq. Some advances have been made in the fight against the IS, however the security environment continues to create challenges for the successful implementation of program activities.

Also, the assumption that *IHEC will receive adequate funding from the Government of Iraq to perform its functions* came as an external factor influencing the implementation of the project. Through the reporting period, the continuous voter registration continued only in 11 governorates with a limited number of polling centers opened. There was no formal media campaign, and the IHEC was reaching the population by word-of-mouth, encouraging potential applicants to register by knocking on doors and approaching local religious, tribal, and civic leaders. The need for a formal, coordinated media campaign is well recognized by the IHEC, and was awaiting a proper budget allocation. Lack of understanding of the process and the motivation behind it is causing some resistance to registration amongst the voting public, according to IHEC.

V. CONCLUSIONS

IFES' accomplishments in Q2 FY15 continued with the successful implementation of the ESP. IFES provided essential support to the IHEC in the continuous voter registration and establishing of the EEI. The IHEC management and staff have praised IFES' ability to react quickly to training needs and to implement high quality trainings and workshops especially given IHEC budgetary limitations.

In addition, IFES provided assistance in the communication planning processes and preparations for the district elections. IFES also played a crucial role in planning for introduction of e-voting in Iraq. IFES' team provided information on suitable mechanisms for e-voting in Iraq, use of technologies in electoral systems, security considerations, and the importance of informational campaigns and public perception of e-voting. IFES also presented case studies from different countries and a sample implementation plan.

Additionally, IFES finalized work on the second nationwide survey gauging for public opinion on the election process in 2014 as well as fielding for information that will inform the biometric registration process and shared the findings with IHEC.